

Governor Deval Patrick's Education Reform Package: Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Promoting Innovation for All

Governor Patrick's education reform package will launch the next chapter of education reform in Massachusetts. By jump-starting the process of intervening in underperforming and chronically underperforming schools and promoting widespread innovations in schools across the state, these proposals deliver a bold new installment of the Readiness Project just in time to qualify Massachusetts to be competitive for federal "Race to the Top" funding. More importantly, this legislation seeks to offer educators and students real choices while moving aggressively to close achievement gaps.

The Governor's reform package includes two initiatives, the Charter School "Smart Cap" bill and the Readiness Schools bill, which will allow the state to:

- 1) Turn around low-performing schools more quickly and effectively and also provide targeted support to students most in need of assistance; and
- 2) Promote innovative in-district schools for all Massachusetts students and families.

Why We Must Act

Sixteen years after the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993, Massachusetts ranks at or near the top on national and international measures of reading, mathematics, and science achievement.

However, our public schools are still failing to effectively serve too many of our students.

- In 2008, 70 percent of English Language Learners and 40 percent of low-income students in the Class of 2010 failed to meet MCAS graduation requirements.
- Based on 2008 statewide graduation data, approximately 70 percent of African American and 60 percent of Latino students graduated from high school in four years compared to approximately 90 percent of White students.
- On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, compared to other states Massachusetts had some of the largest achievement gaps between White students and both African American and Latino students and between lower- and higher-income students in reading and mathematics.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Providing Targeted Support

The Charter School "Smart Cap" bill expands and creates successful charter schools that will serve high-need students in Massachusetts' lowest-performing districts. The bill:

- Increases from 9 to 18 percent the current statutory limitation on a district's net school spending on charter schools for the lowest-scoring 10 percent of school districts, as measured by MCAS results (the number of available seats statewide will increase from 10,000 to 37,000, and the number of available seats in Boston will increase from 660 to 6,600);
- Allows only charter school operators with successful track records to open or expand charter schools in these districts; and
- Requires new or expanded charter schools to recruit and retain low-income students, students scoring in sub-proficient categories on the MCAS or a similar measure, English Language

Learners, students receiving special education, students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out, or other students who should be targeted to eliminate achievement gaps among different groups of students.

In the Readiness Acceleration Schools, conversions of underperforming and chronically underperforming schools, the state will initiate a set of decisive, direct actions to remedy conditions of persistent underperformance, including: 1) modifying existing district and union rules; 2) offering additional curricular and instructional tools; and 3) providing additional supports such as wrap-around health and human services and additional learning time.

For each Readiness Acceleration School, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will develop an “innovation plan” and performance contract with consultation from local stakeholders. The innovation plan will include wrap-around health and human services for students and families and professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

The innovation plan will also allow for greater autonomy and flexibility in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing (including selected waivers or exemptions from teacher contract provisions as necessary to accelerate improvement), and district policies. If the school is underperforming, in most cases the local superintendent will be responsible for implementing the innovation plan and meeting the terms of the performance contract. If the school is chronically underperforming, the Commissioner will designate an external receiver with a successful track record that will be responsible for implementing the innovation plan and meeting the terms of the performance contract.

Promoting Innovative In-District Schools for All Massachusetts Students and Families

The Readiness Schools bill establishes two types of innovative, in-district public schools that:

- Feature high degrees of flexibility and autonomy in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing (including voluntary exemptions or waivers from teacher contract provisions) and school district policies;
- Promote high levels of student achievement through the use of a performance contract;
- Foster innovation by allowing parents, teachers, universities, museums, non-profit organizations, and other groups to submit proposals to establish Readiness Schools;
- Allow educators to fundamentally transform classroom instruction.

Readiness Advantage Schools and **Readiness Alliance Schools** can be established as new schools or as conversions of existing schools. These schools will operate under the terms of a performance contract and an innovation plan approved by the local school committee, which details the areas of autonomy and flexibility the school will feature.

- In **Readiness Advantage Schools**, faculty and school administrators will be primarily responsible for developing and meeting the terms of the school’s performance contract and innovation plan.
- **Readiness Alliance Schools** will feature **comprehensive partnerships with external partners** such as universities, museums, or charter school operators, and these external partners will play a central role in managing the school. In these schools, the external partner will be primarily responsible for developing and meeting the terms of the school’s performance contract and innovation plan.